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ABSTRACT

Up until now Hispanics have not gotten involved in the policy analysis field. By learning to specifically assess the actual or potential impact of alternate policies or programs, it will be possible to help decision makers adopt policies which are more equitable to Hispanics. The following steps may help an individual carry out policy analysis: (1) broadly define the policy analysis topic and scope, including subpopulation, alternatives, impacts, and basis of comparison; (2) identify sources of written information or data bases which can be used in the analysis; (3) identify contacts and use them to obtain additional written information and verbal analyses of issues; (4) use the information you have obtained to frame the issues and clearly specify the methods to be used in carrying out the policy analysis; (5) outline the sections of the report you will be preparing, including introduction, background, issues, alternatives and implications, conclusions and recommendations; (6) carry out the policy analysis, following the steps described in the "Alternatives and Implications" section outline; and (7) prepare one or more policy analysis reports based on findings and prepare to disseminate them appropriately. (PS)

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AN INTRODUCTION TO POLICY ANALYSIS FROM AN HISPANIC PERSPECTIVE

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AN INTRODUCTION TO POLICY ANALYSIS FROM AN HISPANIC PERSPECTIVE

- Emily G. McKay, Executive Vice President
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Definition and Uses

A policy analysis is an analysis and assessment of the actual or potential effects of existing or proposed policies or programs upon specified groups. Typically, policy analyses review several alternative policies and attempt to determine their differential effects, in order to help policy makers decide among these alternatives. Interest groups representing various populations carry out policy analyses from the perspectives of their constituencies or target populations, and use the results to attempt to influence policy makers to adopt policies which will benefit or at least equitably serve their groups. Usually, the term "policy analysis" is interpreted to mean "public policy analysis," but similar techniques can appropriately be used to assess the effects of corporate policies.

Public policy analyses can be useful in both legislative and regulatory decision making. For example, suppose the Congress is considering employment and training legislation. Policy analyses are done by various public interest groups to assess the probable impact on their populations of various proposed components in the legislation. In the recent debate which led to the enactment of the Job Training Partnership Act, analyses were done by labor, women's, civil rights, minority, local and state government, and other groups to assess the probable effects of changes from the existing law such as providing money to the states instead of directly to local governments, increasing the role of the private sector, eliminating most training stipends, and eliminating public service employment. Now that the legislation has been enacted, actual impacts of various components of the law will be monitored and analyzed, and if various public interest groups find that the needs of their populations are not being met, they are likely to recommend changes in the law or in its regulations. Policy analyses can have significant effects. Studies by the General Accounting Office (GAO) have analyzed the effects of existing policies and programs and projected the effects of proposed ones through reviewing the experience with similar approaches in various states and other countries. GAO analyses of the early implementation of the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA), along with similar analyses by interest groups, led to significant changes in the regulations governing that program, primarily to tighten requirements in order to improve targeting to the disadvantaged and improve program management. A similar role for policy analysis exists at the state and local levels.

Need for Policy Analysis by Interest Groups

Policy analyses can be carried out from a "neutral" or an "interest group" perspective. In theory, the "neutral" analyst considers the effects of alternative policies on all subpopulations, and then presents his analyses in such a way that policy makers can identify those alternatives which seem most beneficial overall. Often, such analyses are done in "think tanks" by academically well-trained researchers and analysts. However, it is extremely difficult for anyone to adequately consider the perspectives of the wide range of subpopulations in this country with their disparate socio-economic status,

priorities, and needs. Moreover, few individuals are in fact "neutral," and most policy analysts bring to their task their own political philosophies and attitudes; with "neutral" groups, however, these may not be explicitly stated for the reader. Moreover, this approach assumes that both the analyst and the policy makers will be knowledgeable about and sensitive to the needs of these disparate subpopulations. However, certain groups -- such as racial and ethnic minorities and women -- tend to be seriously underrepresented both among policy analysts in these institutions and among policy makers. "Interest group" policy analyses are one response to this problem.

From an Hispanic perspective, neither "neutral" or non-Hispanic "interest group" analyses have proved satisfactory. Traditionally, Hispanic participation in policy analysis either academically or professionally has been minimal. Hispanics are practically unrepresented within the major "think tanks." Similarly, as pointed out by Harry Pachon, Director of the National Association of Latino Elected Officials (NALEO), Hispanics are almost absent from the policy making levels of the bureaucracy and the legislative branch.* For example, there are now ten Hispanic voting members of the U.S. House of Representatives out of 435 Representatives -- just 2%, while Hispanics are at least 7% of the mainland U.S. population. Hispanics now constitute only about 140 of the more than 15,000 Congressional staff -- less than 1%. They are less then 2% of the federal government's supergrade Senior Executive Service employees, and there are four Hispanics out of 950 employees in the Office of Management and Budget -- or less than 0.5%. While some non-Hispanics have proved extremely sensitive to Hispanic issues, this lack of institutional representation has caused Hispanic policy interests to be largely ignored at the national level, and similar underrepresentation exists in most states with large Hispanic populations.

The analyses of non-Hispanic interest groups, from labor organizations to labor groups and associations of public officials, have typically suffered from a similar lack of Hispanic participation, and reflect widely varying degrees of knowledge of and sensitivity to Hispanic concerns.

If public policies and programs are to be adopted which adequately and equitably benefit Hispanic Americans, then Hispanics must play a lead role in policy analysis. This can be done in several ways: by increasing the number of Hispanics trained in policy analysis and by encouraging Hispanic researchers to become skilled in this specialized field; by increasing the number of Hispanics in policy making and in mainstream policy analysis positions; and by making non-Hispanic policy analysts and policy makers more aware of and sensitive to Hispanic concerns. But these are all long-term efforts. The greatest short-term hope for encouraging the adoption of public policies which equitably benefit Hispanics is to increase the involvement of Hispanic-controlled organizations in the policy analysis process. **

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* See Harry Pachon, "Hispanic Underrepresentation in the Federal Bureaucracy: The Missing Link in the Policy Process," in The State of Chicano Research on Family, Labor, and Migration: Proceedings of the First Stanford Symposium on Chicano Research and Public Policy, edited by Armando Valdez, Albert Camarillo, and Tomas Almaguer, Stanford, California: Center for Chicano Research, 1983.

** See Raul Yzaguirre, "Public Policy Development and the Chicano Community," Ibid.

Legitimacy of Hispanic-Focused Policy Analysis

Hispanic-focused public policy analysis need be no less "legitimate" or sound than analysis done by "neutral" groups. It is, however, by design more focused and limited in its scope. Policy analysis done from an Hispanic perspective is designed specifically to assess the actual or potential impact of certain alternative policies or programs on Hispanics rather than on the population as a whole, and this focus is explicitly stated. The analysis is likely to consider effects on other populations, but primarily for purposes of comparison, either because they are similar to Hispanics or because they are different from Hispanics. Thus an analysis of the probable impact of changes in the federal Migrant Education Program is likely to fully consider the impact on non-Hispanic migrants, and to use non-migrant Hispanics and non-migrant Anglo children as comparison groups. An assessment of the probable impact of "employer sanctions" on employment discrimination will include effects on non-Hispanic individuals who like many Hispanics are physically or linguistically "different," and will contrast this group with native-born White Americans who speak English without a "foreign" accent. Since Hispanics tend to be relatively low-income, may have a first language which is not English, and may be physically recognizable, many Hispanic-focused policy analyses will also consider the effects of policies on other low-income minority and language-minority populations. Similarly, analyses may focus on low-income Hispanics rather than the entire population; for example, an analysis of effects of changes in Medicaid regulations will emphasize the subpopulation of Hispanics who are or were eligible for Medicaid. In all cases, the focus of the policy analysis will be on all Hispanics or subpopulations of Hispanics, with their special characteristics, socio-economic status, and needs.

Hispanic-focused policy analysis, then, is designed to determine the impact of present or proposed policies or programs on Hispanics, and -- based on this determination -- to help decision makers adopt policies which equitably affect Hispanics. Hispanic-focused policy analyses are provided to policy makers with the assumption that they will receive other analyses from other perspectives, including so-called "neutral" analyses as well as analyses done by interest groups representing other segments of the public.

Policy Analysis as a Basis for Advocacy and Public Education

Often, policy analyses become the basis for advocacy. From an Hispanic perspective, policy analyses are invaluable as a source of fact-based information on which to base policy positions. For example, if a local Hispanic group wants to improve employment opportunities for Hispanics, and knows the Congress -- or its state legislature -- is considering employment and training legislation, policy analyses of various alternative bills can help the group determine what kind of legislation to support. In addition, summary analyses themselves can be presented to legislators to show them why a particular bill or a particular component of a bill should be supported or opposed. Similarly, an analysis of the effects of proposed changes in regulations can help a group convince Executive Branch officials at the federal, state, or local level to modify components which would deny Hispanics access to services or benefits of publicly funded programs. Advocacy -- whether or not it is "lobbying" in the legal sense -- is greatly strengthened by the availability of substantive information which supports the advocate's position.

In the past, the paucity of Hispanic-focused policy analysis has greatly weakened Hispanic efforts to inform both policy makers and the public about how policies and programs are affecting Hispanic Americans. Sound policy analyses, presented clearly and concisely in a form appropriate to their target audience, can significantly improve policy maker knowledge of and responsiveness to Hispanic concerns; public understanding can be similarly increased if such analyses can be presented through the media. Public and policy maker education is a long-term process, but it begins with the development and dissemination of sound, fact-based, well-presented policy analyses.

Policy Analysis Skills

Policy analysis is a logical, step-by-step process which can be undertaken successfully by any intelligent and reasonably well-educated individual. It is most easily undertaken by persons who have some research background -- enough to critically interpret data and carry out some analysis of secondary data -- and the ability to organize and carry out tasks through a systematic, well-defined series of steps. The ability to write clear, concise, effective prose is extremely valuable, although this skill can be developed over time by those who are willing to outline, to write and revise, and to cheerfully submit their work to others for critiquing and editing. Knowledge of the policy making process is useful, but it, too, can be developed over time. An understanding of how federal, state, or local policies are translated into programs at the local level, and how these programs affect the Hispanic community, is more important than a detailed background in research and analysis. Like most skills, effective policy analysis requires time and practice, but it can be carried out successfully without formal training. Indeed, the discipline is sufficiently new that few analysts have received formal academic training.

Steps in Policy Analysis

The following steps may help an individual just starting to carry out policy analysis. They are by no means exhaustive, but they can provide the framework for learning the policy analysis process and producing useful policy analysis reports. They are designed to help an individual or organization carry out policy analysis from the perspective of a particular subgroup -- Hispanic Americans. The steps are as follows:

1. Broadly define the policy analysis topic and scope. The exact questions to be answered or the specific aspects of a proposed or existing policy or program to be analyzed usually must be determined over time, as you become knowledgeable about the issue, but it is important to start the process by defining your topic and scope of inquiry. This will include answering questions such as the following:

   - What will be the subpopulation of interest? It may be limited to Hispanics or include both Hispanics and some non-Hispanics (e.g., Hispanics and other minority groups), and it may include all Hispanics or only some Hispanics (e.g., only those who are low-income, only rural dwellers, only Hispanic children).

- What proposals or policy alternatives will you consider? Typically, you will want to include both existing policies and one or more proposed alternatives, usually including several which are under active consideration. You may choose to offer an additional alternative which is not currently being seriously considered, if you feel you could cause it to be considered.

- What types of impacts will be considered? Possible impacts on Hispanics will, of course, depend upon the nature of the analysis, but you are likely to be considering such effects as program or service access, extent of positive program outcomes, enforcement or nonenforcement of civil rights protections, other aspects of access to societal resources, and effects on culturally important aspects of life such as the family.

- What will be your basis of comparison? You may be comparing actual experience with a current policy or program with potential impact of a proposed alternative. In such cases, it may be possible to identify state or local programs to compare with a federal one, or experiences of other countries which have tried similar approaches.

2. Identify sources of written information or data bases which you will use in your analysis. Most often, these will include national data bases (such as Census, the National Longitudinal Survey, Current Population Survey, etc.), participant data bases for entitlement and service programs (e.g., client data from the Department of Labor or the Department of Health and Human Services or from state or local sources), and previous studies. Always look for anything done by the General Accounting Office (GAO) and seek other Government Printing Office publications. Your Congressmember can get you access to studies done by the Congressional Research Service of the Library of Congress. There may be state or local research in the topic area, and state and local agencies may prepare client or other types of data summaries for programs they operate. Try the computerized data bases (e.g., National Technical Information Service or NTIS, Education Research Information Clearinghouse or ERIC, the Medical data base called Medlars). Use a good reference library.

3. Identify contacts and use them to obtain additional written information and verbal analyses of issues. There are several categories of contacts. First, there are legislators, including Congressmembers, their staff,

and Committee staff, and state and local elected officials and their staffs. Then there are Executive Branch contacts at the federal, state, and local levels. In Washington, D.C., these include policy makers and mid-level staff within the various departments and agencies, including the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Executive Office of the President (although the last two may be hard to reach unless you already have contacts). About half the states now have commissions on Hispanic affairs, and often they either have needed data on issues of conern to Hispanics or are able to assist in obtaining it. Certain interest groups are also likely to be involved with a particular issue based on their constituencies. Consider the national associations which represent elected and appointed officials (e.g., the National Governors' Association or NGA, the National Association of Counties or NACO, the National League of Cities/U.S. Conference of Mayors, the National Association of State Legislators); don't forget the National Association of Latino Elected Officials (NALEO). Then there labor organizations (including the Labor Council for Latin American Advancement), educational organizations (from the Council of Great City Schools to the National Education Association), a wide range of professional organizations (the National Association of Social Workers is one of many with an action research focus), and corporate trade associations (the American Petroleum Institute is one of dozens with extensive policy analysis capability). Some of these entities have state affiliates or field offices. There are many other interest groups representing particular populations, from children to the elderly, and representing the general public (e.g., Common Cause), and you should consider local, state, regional, and national ones. Finally, there are the civil rights groups, from the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) to the Black, Hispanic, and other minority groups. Among Hispanic organizations, the following are among those which engage in policy analysis to some degree: the National Council of La Raza, the Institute for Puerto Rican Policy, the legal defense and education funds representing each Hispanic subgroup, the various voter registration education projects, the National Puerto Rican Coalition, the Puerto Rican Forum, the Latino Institute, the Cuban National Planning Council, SER/Jobs for Progress, the U.S. Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC). The Hispanic Policy Development Project, with a Board that is half Hispanic, half Anglo, also carries out policy analysis.

Contact organizations of the types suggested above for two reasons, at different stages in your policy analysis activities:

- First, ask for any written materials they may have on the issue. You need both basic materials such as copies of legislation or regulations, and any policy analyses, evaluations, or data bases they may have which you can use in your policy analyses.

Ask initial contacts to identify other groups which may have such materials, and to specify the best contact within the group.

- Second, identify contacts who can talk to you knowledgeably about the issue. This may be a state legislator or a legislative committee staff member; a mid-level analyst within a federal, state, or local agency; a policy analyst, lobbyist, technical specialist, or researcher within a public interest group. Usually, you will learn the most from professional staff who deal with the issue extensively. For policy analyses of issues on which there is little written information and no good data base, you may depend a great deal upon interviews, and therefore may also want to get opinions from the legislator or agency head, but be sure to have specific questions and be well-informed before you ask to speak to such a person. Often, you will find that you want first to read background materials, then meet with several staff who are knowledgeable about the issue and tend to be sympathetic to your group's interests, then meet with persons who are less likely to take a similar view once you yourself are quite knowledgeable. For all meetings, be sure you have a clear idea of what kinds of information you want, make an appointment ahead giving an idea of what you and the amount of time you need, and take careful notes. If you still have "holes" in your information, ask for other contacts who may be able to fill them.

Personal assessments are not a substitute for fact-based information on an issue, but knowledgeable personal contacts are an invaluable means of identifying little-known studies, helping you to frame the issues and identify key areas for analysis, and helping you get access to public data bases or studies which have not been disseminated publicly.

4. Use the information you have obtained to frame the issues and clearly specify the methods to be used in carrying out the policy analysis. This process will provide you with an analysis plan and the key components of a report outline. Be sure to do the following:

- Define the scope of your analysis, including what issues will and will not be addressed.

- Prepare a one-paragraph summary of the scope and focus of your policy analysis. Be sure that you and others in your organization are satisfied with it.

- Clearly identify the policy options you will consider. You will use the same analysis questions and methods to assess each policy alternative.

- List the impact issues you will address and use them to develop a set of questions to be answered or criteria to be used to assess each policy alternative. These questions or criteria will indicate the types of positive and negative impacts on Hispanics you will be seeking to measure for each policy alternative.

- Review the available data and determine what analyses or reformatting will be necessary before you can use the information for your analyses. If you have information gaps -- for example, you plan to assess the effects of an existing program on civil rights enforcement, but you have no information on actual enforcement -- figure out how you will fill them.

- Carry out any required data analyses. If you have data which must be manipulated to generate information in a usable form, carry out the necessary work and generate the necessary tables or other output. This may include summarizing interview data or tabulating the results of any primary data collection you have carried out, through interviews or other means.

- Determine which information can be used to answer which questions, and organize the data so they can readily be found and used in the analysis. Extract useful information from large reports or data bases, and organize it according to the question it will help answer or the type of impact it will help measure. Organizing your information -- including material obtained through interviews as well as written reports -- before you begin to do your final analysis will make that process far more efficient than trying to find the relevant information as you go.

5. Outline the sections of the report you will be preparing.
This step is useful since the report outline also provides the outline for much of your analysis. Usually, you will have the following major sections (excluding the Executive Summary, which is required for any report of more than five or six pages):

- Introduction - Describes the issue and the scope of the analysis; can be based on that summary paragraph developed in Step 4. Includes a clear statement of your perspective in the analysis (e.g., implications for Hispanics).

- Background - Provides historical development of the issue or question, including legislative and often administrative history. May also include information on historical problems of Hispanics under previous policies and programs.

- Issues - Describes the policy questions currently under consideration, the aspects of the issue which are of greatest concern to Hispanics, and where necessary to an understanding of the issues, the positions of other major interest groups.

- Alternatives and Implications - The heart of your analysis. Precise format will vary, but includes (a) a clear description of the policy alternatives being considered; (b) a specification of the criteria or questions being applied to each (the types of impacts on Hispanics which will be considered); (c) a discussion of the limitations of the analysis, such as incomplete or inadequate data; and (d) an analysis of each of the policy alternatives in terms of its implications for Hispanics -- that is, a narrative which presents the results of your policy analysis.

- Conclusions and Recommendations - Based on the policy analysis provided and the results presented in the previous section, concludes that one of the policy alternatives would be most beneficial to Hispanics, and recommends its adoption, with or without modifications.

6. Carry out the policy analysis, following the steps described in the "Alternatives and Implications" section outline.
Apply all criteria or questions consistently to each policy alternative, review the available information, and determine the positive and negative impacts on Hispanics which can be demonstrated or projected for each policy alternative. Summarize this information clearly and concisely, emphasizing the facts which are the foundation of your analysis. Identify the sources of your data. Approach each analysis in a step-by-step, logical manner. Identify the components of each policy alternative which are of concern; determine the probable positive or negative effects on Hispanics of that policy, given actual experience with this or similar policies; examine the data which allow you to determine that impact; and explain why a particular policy is likely to cause difficulties. Where effects on Hispanics are likely to be different from effects on other other groups, specify why. Analyze each of the alternatives fully, and summarize your findings with reference to the available data. Be sure to write down the results of each step in this process.

7. Prepare one or more policy analysis reports based on your findings, and prepare to disseminate them appropriately.
A "full" policy analysis generally requires the report sections described in Step 5, but they may be provided in detail or very briefly. Be aware that few decision makers will read a policy analysis over two or three pages long, unless they have a special interest in the

group which prepared it. Instead, prepare an Executive Summary for the policy maker, and provide a more detailed report to his/her staff. You may also find that you will need to prepare several versions of a report for different purposes. For example, if you have done a thorough analysis of a piece of legislation or a set of proposed regulations, but current debate focuses on just one aspect of it, you should prepare a brief analysis which covers only that aspect. Be sure you get the reports to the appropriate individuals, including not only decision makers and their staffs but also other interest groups which need to understand why you support or oppose certain policy alternatives. Also be sure to keep your constituency informed of the results of your analysis.

Conclusions

Policy analysis is a time-consuming process, but it is also a logical, sequential procedure. Once you have gone through the steps several times, you should find it increasingly easy to design and carry out a policy analysis of an issue of special interest to you and your organization. Some policy analysis makes extensive use of quantitative data, but the kinds of relatively quick-response analyses done by most groups depend largely upon existing quantitative data and qualitative information. The trick is to learn how to identify available information and valuable information sources, and to tap them effectively; to carry out a sound and balanced analysis of alternatives; and to present your findings clearly and effectively.